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Divorce

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Module: Divorce

Overview & rationale

This module will provide an overview of parental divorce, as well as its impact on children and the family structure. Students will use topical readings and Sesame Street video clips to learn about the impact of divorce on children (e.g. academic, emotional, social), as well as factors that influence postdivorce outcomes (e.g., race/ethnicity, parenting styles, changes in family structure, availability of noncustodial parent).

Potential classes: Intro Psych, Developmental Psychology (Child Development, Lifespan Development), Counseling/Clinical Psychology, Education classes

Potential format and modality: Lecture or seminar class; online, hybrid, in-person

Topical Readings:

- Amato, P. R. (2014). The consequences of divorce for adults and children: An update. *Drustvena Istrazivanja*, 23(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.5559/di.23.1.01>
- Bray, J. H. (2019). Remarriage and stepfamilies. In B. H. Fiese, M. Celano, K. Deater-Deckard, E. N. Jouriles, & M. A. Whisman (Eds.), *APA handbook of contemporary family psychology: Foundations, methods, and contemporary issues across the lifespan* (pp. 707–724). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000099-039>
- Demir-Dagdas, T., Isik-Ercan, Z., Intepe-Tingir, S., & Cava-Tadik, Y. (2018). Parental divorce and children from diverse backgrounds: Multidisciplinary perspectives on mental health, parent–child relationships, and educational experiences. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 59(6), 469–485. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2017.1403821>
- Hakvoort, E. M., Bos, H. M. W., Van Balen, F., & Hermanns, J. M. A. (2011). Postdivorce Relationships in Families and Children's Psychosocial Adjustment. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 52(2), 125–146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2011.546243>
- Kim, J. Y., & Tasker, F. (2013). The effects of parental divorce: A culture-specific challenge for young adults in South Korea. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 54(5), 349–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2013.800387>
- Morrison, S. C., Fife, S. T., & Hertlein, K. M. (2017). Mechanisms behind prolonged effects of parental divorce: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 58(1), 44–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2016.1262652>
- Sun, Y., & Li, Y. (2007). Racial and ethnic differences in experiencing parents' marital disruption during late adolescence. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(3), 742–762. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00403.x>

Tullius, J. M., De Kroon, M., Almansa, J., & Reijneveld, S. A. (2021). Adolescents' mental health problems increase after parental divorce, not before, and persist until adulthood: A longitudinal TRAILS study. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 10.1007/s00787-020-01715-0. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-020-01715-0>

Video Clips:

General Overview of Divorce

- [Sesame Street: Little Children, BIG Challenges - Divorce](#) (2:26)--stop at 1:56
 - Summary: This clip defines divorce, acknowledges the complicated emotions a child might be feeling (Abby and real children) and reiterates that even if parents do not love each other anymore they still love their child(ren).
 - This could be a good clip for Intro or Developmental classes, providing an overview of divorce and family reactions.

Tips for Adults Supporting Children Through Divorce

- [Sesame Street: Little Children, BIG Challenges - Divorce- "It's not your fault"](#) (1:13)
 - Summary: Abby and Gordon discuss Abby's feelings that the divorce is her fault and Gordon reassures her that it is not.
 - This could be a good clip for counseling students learning how to address children's fears and concerns about divorce.
- [Sesame Street: Little Children, BIG Challenges - Divorce- "Responding to Reactions" Parent tip](#) (2:42)
 - Summary: A parent provides her perspective of how each of her children is handling their divorce. A good reminder that the impact of divorce can vary based on a variety of factors (e.g., gender, age, personality).
 - This could be a good supplement to the Hakvoort et al. (2011) article on postdivorce relationships.
 - This could be a good clip for counseling students learning how to address children's fears and concerns about divorce.
- [Sesame Street: Little Children, BIG Challenges - Divorce](#) (18 videos including the ones listed above)
 - Summary: Youtube playlist containing 18 Sesame Street clips about helping children understand and deal with divorce.
 - This could be a good playlist for counseling students learning how to address children's fears and concerns about divorce.

Activities:

- Before class, have students read the Kim and Tasker (2013) and Morrison et al. (2017) articles on parental divorce. In class, show [Divorce](#). Have students complete a jigsaw activity, initially discussing the mechanisms that help children understand divorce. Divide the class into four initial expert groups, with each group focusing on one mechanism - open communication, presence of (parental) support, participants' view of themselves, and their view of future relationships (romantic and familial). Give the groups time to discuss their mechanism, then have 1-2 students from each expert group (depending on

the size of the class) form new jigsaw groups to recommend advice to parents and other adults helping children deal with divorce. Alternatively, students could read different articles on divorce and consider ways we can help children talk about and understand difficult topics in their jigsaw groups.

- *Notes: appropriate for both lecture and seminar-based classes. Could be adapted for a synchronous online class using breakout rooms.*
- Assign articles on divorce (i.e. Morrison et al., 2017; Amato, 2014) for students to read before class. During class, divide students into pairs with one student playing a “child” experiencing parental divorce and the other acting as a “counselor.” Instructors could have students watch Sesame Street video clips (i.e. “[It’s not your fault](#),” “[Responding to reactions](#)”), or provide them with contextual information (e.g., age, gender, internalizing or externalizing problems) to help them get into character. Additionally, a case study could be presented as context for the roleplaying scenario to help students get into character.
 - *Notes: appropriate for a lecture-based class. Could be a good activity for a class on counseling skills. Might be appropriate for upper level/graduate students.*
 - *Notes on usage:*
- Assign articles on divorce (i.e. Sun & Li, 2007; Demir-Dagdaz et al., 2018; Kim & Tasker, 2013; Tullius et al., 2021) for students to read before class. At the start of class, put students into small groups to discuss the way divorce is regarded within our society. Ask them to think about historical and cultural differences influencing how people think about divorce.
 - *Notes: appropriate for a lecture or seminar-based class. Could be adapted for both synchronous and asynchronous online formats using discussion forums and/or breakout rooms.*
- Show students [Divorce](#) during class and ask them to identify certain tactics Sesame Street uses to explain divorce and its consequences. Have students consider the pros and cons of addressing divorce on a children’s show.
 - *Notes: appropriate for lecture or seminar-based class. Could be adapted for both synchronous and asynchronous online formats.*
- Towards the end of class, ask students to consider ways to help children talk about and understand difficult topics like divorce. Give them time to reflect on class materials and write a short response to the posed question.
 - *Notes: appropriate for lecture and seminar-based class. Could easily be adapted for synchronous and asynchronous online formats.*

Supplemental Materials and Resources

- Sesame Street in Communities web page containing a number of resources regarding parental divorce. Includes articles, workshops, videos, stories, and printables:
<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/divorce/>

Related Modules:

- [Parenting](#)
- [Incarceration](#)